

**Eulogy in Honor
of
Staff Sergeant Joseph John Hamski**

Presented by:
Lieutenant Colonel William H. Kale III, PE, PMP
Commander, 52d Civil Engineer Squadron
Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany

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Mrs. Winston, Christina, and special guests here today,

As Staff Sergeant Joseph Hamski's squadron commander, it is honor for me to stand in front of you today to talk about Sergeant Hamski's impressive Air Force career. I am terribly saddened by this event and wish it never happened, but unfortunately our country is at war and sometimes great families, such as the Hamskis, make unexpected and painful sacrifices during these trying times to ensure our American way of life.

I first met Joe last summer when I recertified him for our Personnel Reliability Program enabling him to work on and around nuclear weapons. One of my responsibilities as a commander is to conduct a personal interview probing into any potentially disqualifying information particularly dealing with past medical history and police records – let me tell you firsthand this can be a very embarrassing interview because everybody has potentially disqualifying information such as speeding tickets or weird medical issues, including myself. For never meeting Sergeant Hamski before and then asking him probing questions about his past private life, he had a great attitude and more importantly, a dry sense of humor which lightened the atmosphere and made it easier for me to complete my task at hand. Based on this interview,

I knew Joe was a true professional and somebody you wanted on your team. I am not going to talk about any of Joe's embarrassing potentially disqualifying information or any funny stories but I hope to highlight some of the amazing things he did over the past eight years as an American Airman. It is hard to believe one person had such an impact on so many people and in so many places, but it is true – Staff Sergeant Joe Hamski is a real American hero.

Becoming an Air Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal or EOD technician is not an easy walk in the park. Many folks do not realize less than 20 percent of eligible Americans meet military standards and less than 2 percent of this eligible population actually make the cut to serve our country and wear a uniform. Joe exceeded these standards and officially entered the Air Force on 14 January 2003. He also made it through a grueling EOD training regiment where the washout rate is typically around 40%. When somebody makes it through the EOD pipeline, you know they have proven themselves as someone who has a lot of dedication, ingenuity, and determination.

Joe's first assignment after completing the EOD training pipeline was at Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, New Mexico in January 2004. His first supervisor, Staff Sergeant Rob Brown, described Joe as a "bright growing star among his peers and a highly competent self starter who continues to advance his craft." He

immediately made an impact at Cannon Air Force Base by maintaining over 40 thousand pieces of specialized sensitive gear worth over three million dollars with zero discrepancies, clearing thousands of hazardous munitions at Melrose Air Force Range, supporting several United States Secret Service missions responsible for the protection of the President and Vice President of the United States, and saving multiple aircraft worth millions of dollars by removing hazardous flares or munitions. He showed his military professionalism by winning the squadron's "Sharpest Troop" award for impeccable uniform wear and "Outstanding Dormitory Room" for flawless attention to detail. He also was very active in the local community by demonstrating his EOD skills to the Clovis Alternate Education Students, teaching explosive safety to Junior ROTC students, volunteering to help hundreds of school children at several different events, and wowing over six thousand citizens with robotic demonstrations at Cannon's Air Expo. Joe even helped the FBI after a bank robbery by identifying a hoax improvised explosive device which allowed special agents to safely begin their investigation.

In August 2005, Sergeant Hamski went on his first deployment with the 332nd Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron and Army Third Battalion in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. He played a pivotal role in the success of 150 EOD missions and displayed outstanding robotics operations during 19 counter

improvised explosive device missions. He assisted Army Special Forces in capturing 250 munitions, 75 improvised explosive device parts, and two bomb-makers which saved countless lives. He was ultimately responsible for the planning and success of 36 cache, 20 unexploded ordnance, and 10 captured enemy ammunitions missions performed by his team and denied anti-Iraqi Forces of over 15 thousand pounds of potential improvised explosive device materials. For these actions, Sergeant Hamski was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for exceptionally meritorious service in March 2006.

Sergeant Hamski did not get much time to catch his breath before the Air Force deployed him again in January 2007 to the 506th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Sergeant Hamski executed 221 combat missions in direct support of the Third Brigade Combat Team with the 25th Infantry Division which led to the exploitation, recovery, or destruction of 38 improvised explosive devices, 814 unexploded ordnance, and four weapon caches. His efforts safeguarded over 16 thousand Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen who travelled throughout northern Iraq – thanks Joe, I travelled many of these roads around this time and I am sure you made my life safer. He proved his ability to perform in the face of even the most arduous of situations while responding to a vehicle loaded with explosives – his skill's were put to the test during a seven hour render-safe procedure on this extremely

volatile vehicle, but he defeated the booby trap with utmost precision and attention to detail. Once again, Joe undeniably saved lives. For these actions, Sergeant Hamski was awarded his second Army Commendation Medal for outstanding dedication to duty and the highly prestigious Army Combat Action Badge in July 2007.

When Sergeant Hamski returned from his second deployment, he had a little over a month to unpack his bags before he had to pack them up again to move to Korea. Before he left, he was awarded the Air Force Achievement Medal for meritorious service at Cannon Air Force Base and directly contributing to his team winning Air Combat Command's Outstanding EOD Fight Award. His Flight Chief, Master Sergeant Harold Hailer said Joe was "a Standout Airmen...with outstanding initiative and selfless drive who sets the example for others to follow."

Sergeant Hamski arrived at Kunsan Air Base in October of 2007 to serve with the Eighth Fighter Wing affectionately known as the Wolf Pack. His flight chief Master Sergeant Jeff Shuman said Joe "hit the ground running, led the pack, and was an exceptional Airmen who embodies core values." Sergeant Hamski was a seasoned leader who maintained six million dollars worth of deployment equipment, revised the flight safety program ensuring nobody was injured over a 16 month period, trained Korean Army leadership on EOD capabilities, safed numerous munitions preventing

damage to several multi-million dollar F-16 aircraft, and cleared over 200 munitions alongside his Korean counterparts from their range exhibiting our joint nation commitment. Sergeant Hamski also earned a Superior Performance Award during an Operational Readiness Exercise for expertly completing 55 EOD responses without any errors plus won a Safety Award from the Eighth Fighter Wing which also helped the unit earn an “Excellent” rating during the Pacific Air Forces Unit Compliance Inspection. Joe also volunteered a lot of his personal time at a local orphanage and squadron charity events – he was an ambassador to over 2,600 citizens in the community. However; his most notable achievement at Kunsan, one his mother refers to as the best decision he made during his life, was marrying his soul mate Christina so they could spend the rest of their lives together. Sergeant Hamski left Kunsan in March 2009 and was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal for his distinctive accomplishments.

Sergeant Hamski arrived at Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany in March 2009. Spangdahlem is the home of the “Sabers” and provided Joe a huge leap in responsibility because diverse EOD mission including nuclear weapon response. He took charge of the Nuclear Certification Program ensuring new team members were properly trained, trained fellow Airmen at Ramstein Air Base on F-16 and A-10 flight emergencies so they could provide stand-by assistance for our Fighter Wing, and

excelled during EOD upgrade and enhanced combat skills training. Despite a very busy schedule, Joe found time to help out his peers by volunteering several weekends as a designated driver to combat drunk driving and led a robot confidence course for over 500 people at our annual Spring Fling. It was not very long before the Air Force needed Sergeant Hamski on his third deployment with the Combined Joint Task Force Paladin and sent him to the most dangerous area in Afghanistan in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. He executed 20 combat and 30 route clearance missions covering a two thousand mile area and safed 15 improvised explosive devises enabling coalition forces to safely conduct regional movement. He trained 60 Soldiers on improvised explosive device awareness greatly boosting their confidence and ability to serve their Combat Brigade. During this deployment, Sergeant Hamski was awarded a Joint Achievement Medal AND a Joint Commendation Medal for his heroic and highly skilled actions.

Sergeant Hamski returned back to Spangdahlem Air Base and took his performance to the next level. He led our Personal Reliability Program which earned an “Excellent” rating by the Inspector General, supported the Secret Service again by helping protect the First Lady during her visit to Germany, helped prepare the 606th Air Control Squadron for their deployment to Afghanistan by teaching them about improvised explosive devices, and

responded to several suspect package calls to our Post Office. His most significant effort went toward preparing for our Nuclear Surety Inspection which he aced two EOD practical exercises and helped his flight earn United States Air Forces in Europe Inspector General's only "Outstanding" rating – the highest achievable score for any inspection. He also supported the 480th Fighter Squadron's deployment to Bulgaria in support of THRACIAN STAR enabling them to conduct 116 sorties with zero munitions incidents. Joe once again volunteered his precious time to help the squadron raise over 10 thousand dollars at our Haunted House and the Fall Bazaar. He also briefed 50 Air Force Academy Cadets about EOD giving them invaluable tactical operations experience and inspired our future Air Force leaders. Senior Master Sergeant George Price said Sergeant Hamski's "technical knowledge and dedication propelled our squadron to win the United States Air Forces in Europe best Civil Engineer Squadron award" and Captain Matt Borawski said Sergeant Hamski's "leadership and expertise were key to winning Air Force's Best EOD Flight Award runner-up."

Sergeant Hamski left for his fourth and ultimately his final deployment in January 2011 to Afghanistan with the 466th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Flight as a part of Combined Joint Task Force Palidin again in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. I know Sergeant Hamski was well trained, well equipped, well

prepared, and ready for this deployment. I saw numerous pictures of Joe from January until May where either he was smiling or had a “goofy” serious looks on his face. Like most Airmen in the deployed environment, Joe excelled during “Mustache March” and grew a very impressive “stache” for others to enjoy. Several of our senior non-commissioned officers and Chief Master Sergeant Les Jones visited with Joe in Afghanistan on several occasions and stated he was in good spirits and enjoying his deployment. Staff Sergeant Hamski loved what he did for the Air Force. Unfortunately, on 26 May 2011 his Air Force career and ultimately his life came to a tragic end. While I do not know the specifics of this event, I would like to read to you some words from his Bronze Star Medal with Valor citation which really describes why Joe is such a special Airman and EOD technician:

“Sergeant Hamski and his team were air inserted into the extremely volatile Shorabak border region of southern Afghanistan to clear a safe area from which his group and others to follow could neutralize a known weapons cache exploited by the enemy. He and the rest of the team deliberately entered territory known to be hostile and dangerous where they were confronted with multiple victim operated improvised explosive devises. Sergeant Hamski methodically set to rendering the area safe so the weapons cache could be neutralized and soldiers saved

from mortal danger. While engaged to save others from harm, Sergeant Hamski was mortally wounded.”

For these actions, Sergeant Hamski was also posthumously awarded the Purple Heart Medal for his sacrifice to our great nation.

Mrs. Winston, Christina, the rest of the Hamski family, and Joe’s brothers and sisters in EOD; I cannot possibly put in words how saddened I am by Joe’s death. Mrs. Winston and Christina, you have shown great courage and strength and I know it has helped me and countless others carry out our duties the past week. Both of you stated your Air Force family has helped you throughout this ordeal, when in reality it has been both of you encouraging and comforting the Air Force family during this period of mourning. Despite your heartbreaking loss, you are an inspiration to me, our unit, your community, the Air Force, and our nation.

So I would like to leave you with some thoughts of mine which are probably things you already know. Your son Mrs. Winston and your husband Christina is an amazing person, an amazing Airman, an amazing patriot, and an amazing American. While never the center of attention; Joe’s integrity, service, and excellence epitomized our Air Force core values enabling him to accomplish great missions and set the example for other Airmen to follow. I have been in the Air Force for almost sixteen years, commanded two squadrons, led thousands

Airmen, spent over three years in combat zones all over the world, and worked on Capitol Hill and the Pentagon, and all I can say is Staff Sergeant Joe Hamski has done more for his country and had a greater impact on humanity than most Americans or I ever will have over a lifetime. In a day and age when most Americans take our freedom for granted, Joe raised his right hand swearing to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Joe could of found an easier, higher paying job but chose to enlist in the Air Force because he wanted a bigger challenge, serve a higher calling, develop a special bond with his fellow service men and women, and make a difference in this world. As you can clearly see, Joe succeeded at all these goals. He accomplished his bigger challenge by becoming an Airman and effectively performing hazardous duties as an EOD tech. He excelled at serving a higher calling by saving countless lives on the battlefield which helped create a more democratic and peaceful Iraq and Afghanistan. He clearly developed a close bond to his fellow service men and women which is why so many of them travelled thousands of miles to be here with Joe today and / or tomorrow. Finally, Joe made a difference in this world – while it is hard to quantify, it is clearly obvious he left this world better than it was given to him. I know there are many of us who are extremely grateful for everything Joe sacrificed for the Air Force and his country.

God Bless You Staff Sergeant Joseph Hamski, may you keep a watchful and protective eye over your family, your friends, your fellow EOD brothers and sisters, your Civil Engineer Squadron mates, your United States Air Force, and the United States of America.